DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 903 JC 900 213

AUTHOR Turner, Caroline Sotello Viernes
TITLE It Takes Two To Transfer: Relational Networks and Educational Outcomes.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Articulation (Education); Case Studies; College Role; *College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; Feeder Patterns; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Mexican Americans; *Minority Groups; *Transfer Policy; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

Intercollegiate cooperation, an essential element of successful course articulation and student transfer, can be hindered by the inherent differences between two- and four-year institutions, such as their mission emphases, functional priorities, and preconceptions about the other. In 1986, a study was conducted of three community colleges in California to examine the extent to which relational networks (i.e., formal and informal interactions and agreements) with four-year institutions might affect transfer policies and rates, particularly for Hispanic students of Mexican American descent. Data on the colleges' structures and routines were gathered through interviews, on-site observations, document review, and student surveys. Hispanic versus non-Hispanic white student transfer rates at the three colleges chosen for the study were assessed as low (11% vs 18%), high (34% vs 39%), and discrepant (19% vs 43%), when compared to the systemwide transfer rate averages (20% for Hispanics vs 39% for non-Hispanic whites). Study findings included the following: (1) interviews with articulation officers revealed that four-year colleges seem to respond more favorably to curricular articulation with community colleges that have a higher student transfer record; (2) interviews also suggested that the transfer status of a two-year college may be perpetuated by the historical relationship in which the two-year college acts as a feeder school for certain four-year institutions; and (3) low-transfer community colleges have high minority enrollments suggesting that minorities have fewer options to transfer to four-year institutions than non-minority students attending schools with higher transfer rates. A 13-item bibliography is included. (PAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED333903

IT TAKES TWO TO TRANSFER:

RELATIONAL NETWORKS AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. S. Turner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

JC900213

Abstract

Results of a qualitative case study suggest that the community college transfer process, including the development of formal interinstitutional articulation agreements, is shaped by an historical, informal but routinized network of curricular relationships with four-year colleges and universities.

IT TAKES TWO TO TRANSFER:
RELATIONAL NETWORKS AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The fact that the United States higher education system has a transfer process distinguishes it from systems in much of the rest of the world. In The Higher Education System, Burton Clark notes that there is a high degree of articulation and permeability in the U.S. system compared to that in other countries. We can take pride in the opportunities the transfer process offers students for access across colleges and universities as we attempt to better understand and improve it.

Transfer and "The Complexity of Joint Action"

Current literature suggests that the complexity of the transfer process may impede community college students from getting their baccalaureate degrees. Watkins (1990) cites Palmer saying that transferring "is a tough bureaucratic task" for students. Michael A. Olivas (1979) notes that "negotiating transfer constantly appears to be an impediment to baccalaureate completion by students...." Organizational theorists Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) document the fact that organizational processes often look simple and straightforward, but they are actually extremely complicated and can break down at any number of steps in the process.

Current literature also suggests that interinstitutional cooperation, which is essential to successful articulation, faces barriers. These include: differing cultures in two- and four-year colleges, such as mission emphasis (community needs vs. knowledge generation) and functional priority (teaching vs. research) (Richardson, Jr. and Bender, 1987); self-interest, which dictates, for instance, improved articulation when there are too few high school graduates to maintain desired enrollment, and deteriorating articulation when personalities clash (Richardson, Jr. and Bender, 1987); a choice by community colleges to vocationalize themselves (Brint and Karabel, 1989); and the tendency of four-year colleges to see community college students as "not as good as" their students (Watkins, 1990).

Moreover, difficulties in the transfer process work against minority students because they "are so overwhelmingly clustered in two-year institutions" (Olivas, 1979). Richardson, Jr. and Bender (1987) say that articulation works reasonably well from the perspectives of universities and suburban community college administrators, but much of current practice appears to impact adversely on inner city colleges and the heavy minority student populations who attend them.

A study by this author addresses the potential effects of interinstitutional relationships on transfer. Relational networks may be one of many factors contributing to the differential implementation of transfer policies among two- and four-year colleges.

Study Description

This paper is based on a 1986 qualitative case study of the transfer process for Hispanic students and non-Hispanic white students in three California community colleges. Given limited space, a thorough review of study methodology and findings cannot be presented here. Further discussion of this research can be found in "A California Case Study: Organizational Determinants of the Transfer of Hispanic Students From Two- to Four-Year Colleges in the Bay Area" (Turner, in press).

Comparative Case Study Approach

In order to generate hypotheses about community college organizational factors (structures and routines) that may explain differential transfer rates by college, I conducted an exploratory, multi-site case study of three California community colleges in the Bay Area with varying transfer rates for Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. I used semi-structured interviews, observations, document review, and student surveys to collect data on community college structures and routines from the perspective of staff, faculty, Hispanic students, and non-Hispanic white students.

Hispanic students targeted for study are of Mexican-American descent. In order to obtain comparable study sites, attempts were made to control for Hispanic student population attributes (e.g. student socio-economic status), community college size (total college enrollment), percent Hispanic enrollment, geographical location, and proximity to a four-year college. All three sites are in the

mid-sized group of California community colleges. Enrollments range from 7,000 to 11,000. All are suburban community colleges located in close proximity to a four-year college and to a highly-populated Hispanic community. Hispanic study participants are predominantly from low-income families, reporting smaller incomes and larger family size than non-Hispanic white students participating in the study.

Colleges selected for the study exhibit low, high, or discrepant transfer rates, when compared to systemwide transfer percentages, for Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students. College Low has an 18% transfer rate for non-Hispanic white students and 11% for Hispanic students. College High has a 39% transfer rate for non-Hispanic white students and 34% for Hispanic students. College Discrepant has a 43% transfer rate for non-Hispanic white students and 19% for Hispanic students. This compares to a systemwide transfer rate of 39% for non-Hispanic white students and 20% for Hispanic students. There is no community college with a low transfer rate for non-Hispanic white students and a high transfer rate for Hispanics.

Interviews conducted with community college articulation officers suggest that there may be a set of routinized networks encasing individual community colleges in a web of transfer or non-transfer opportunities.

Interinstitutional Linkages: It Takes Two to Transfer

Student movement from two- to four-year colleges is assisted by the articulation of curriculum from one level to the other.

Articulation officers from both college levels arrive together at articulation agreements which the four-year schools use to grant course credit for classes taken at the community college. Articulation officers at College High and College Discrepant also work with feeder high schools to articulate high school courses with community college courses. High school credits can then be used to fulfill community college requirements.

Articulation officers interviewed for this study are part of the counseling services department. At all community college study sites, the articulation function, which is, at most, a half-time assignment, is handled by the student services area rather than the instructional administration area.

Informal interactions between two-year and four-year college representatives, as described by community college articulation officers, seem to have an impact on the institutional transfer process.

Impact of Social Networks

According to the California Master Plan for Higher Education, transfer work at a community college theoretically transfers to all four-year colleges. The Plan assumes an educational market exists such that one can move from any given community college to almost any four-year program. However, informal networks appear to actually drive the transfer process. Mark Granovetter (1985) argues that there is a strong effect of social context on seemingly rational choices. He states:

> "[T]he main thrust of the 'new institutional economists' is to deflect the analysis of institutions from sociological, historical, and legal argumentation and show instead that they arise as the efficient solution to economic problems. The mission and pervasive functionalism it implies discourage the detailed analysis of social structure that I argue here is the key to understanding how existing institutions arrived at their present state.
>
> "Perhaps this web of interaction is mainly what explains the level of efficiency, be it high or low, of the new organizational form."

Granovetter's work helps explain the findings of the study discussed in this paper. All three California community college sites appear to be embedded in an informal but routinized network of curricular relationships with four-year colleges which differentially affects the opportunity for student transfer.

First, study interviews reveal that some community colleges acquire a status as transfer schools and others do not. Four-year colleges seem to respond more favorably to curricular articulation with community colleges having a high student transfer record than with those having a low record. Kanter (1977) has documented a preference by individuals for "socially similar" individuals. This study suggests that the same phenomena may extend to organizational

interactions. The status accorded low-transfer colleges influences how four-year institutions respond to them, as these comments made by articulation officers illustrate:

> College Low: "Some [four-year colleges] don't think their staff time is of use because we don't send them many students. For example, I've sent five letters to [a four-year university] and they've never responded."

By contrast, College High and College Discrepant articulation officers make these remarks:

> College Discrepant: "[One four-year university] is very active in communicating with community colleges in establishing course by course agreements. [We have agreements] with [this four-year university's] biology, math, engineering, and physics departments."

> College High: "The four-year institutions are making a stronger pledge to be available.... [Four-year college representatives] usually came [to College High] once in the spring of the year. [A state college representative] now comes three times...."

Second, interview comments suggest that the transfer status of a community college may, in part, be perpetuated by the historical

relationship of the two-year college with the four-year colleges already in its network of transfer options. Thus, some community colleges have specific connections with and serve as feeder schools to specific four-year colleges. The following remarks by community college articulation officers elaborate on these interinstitutional linkages:

> College Low: "[We] contact individual campuses for course by course articulation.... [There are] no articulation agreements with all California State Colleges or University of California campuses because we don't send anyone to some of the campuses, like [four-year state college]. At [this four-year state college] we don't have course specific agreements, just general education agreements."

> College Discrepant: "We don't have [articulation agreements] with a lot of campuses. There are some campuses that we have a lot of difficulty with in terms of 'is your course equivalent to my course?' I spend more of my time on campuses where most of our students go--campuses that are very close and that I can telephone, such as [near-by four-year university]."

> College High: "[We] do concentrated articulation with near-by colleges... These colleges would be the ones I

would concentrate on first simply because that's where our students tend to go."

Faculty, students, and other staff affiliated with the different study sites also make the following comments further elaborating on the transfer status of their college and its historical relationship with four-year colleges:

College Low: "Our students are crippled by not having a collegiate identity... Recently, there was an attempt [in the district] to make [College Low] a vocational school. Transfer courses would not be offered."

"We're not just a night school. I'm not going to feel that I've done a good job unless I feel that the word is out."

College Discrepant: "We have a good rate of transfer. If the student choses a [four-year] college program that has a long standing articulation relationship with [College Discrepant], then fewer problems may be encountered...If the student follows the pattern, there is no problem."

"I went to [four-year college]. I had high grades but not adequate financial assistance. They recommended that I come

to [College Discrepant] and then transfer... Students come here assuming they are going to transfer."

College High: "[College High] is one of the better junior colleges around. [Four-year state university] has classes that I can take here. I want to transfer to [four-year state university]."

"They [four-year colleges] come from all over the area to recruit [College High] students."

The transfer network (ties between two-year and four-year colleges) seems to be routinized at each college. In other words, once a successful connection is made between a four-year and a two-year college, that connection is strengthened by communications between the articulation officers. Students then successfully use this connecting bridge, further strengthening ties. Other potential ties may not be pursued.

The choice of a community college may amount also to the choice of the four-year college. Theoretically all choices are open to students, but are all choices equally probable? Perhaps it is easier for students to transfer to schools that already have strong ties with the community college they are attending. Rogers and Kincaid (1981) and Kanter (1977) refer to homogeneous communication and relational networks as being self-sealing and self-reinforcing. Following this line of thought, it may be that transfer institutions

and non-transfer institutions are embedded in a transfer or non-transfer network which is also self-sealing and self-reinforcing. Counselors, other students, and faculty may encourage students to transfer to well-articulated colleges because students can go there with little or no trouble. The transfer process may become institutionalized, and even if unconscious, reinforce the present connections and the potential trajectory of students. This phenomenon can be related to Merton's discussion of "The Matthew Effect in Science" (1968). He argues that "the rich get richer at a rate that makes the poor become relatively poorer" partly as a result of a social network process.

The transfer status of a community college is perpetuated not only by individual differences in student capability, but also by the historical relationships between the two- and four-year colleges and by the propensity of four-year colleges to respond more readily to community colleges with good transfer records than to those with low records. Therefore, community colleges may not be a "stepping stone" to all four-year colleges as the California Master Plan for Higher Education proposes. Moreover, to the extent that low-transfer community colleges have high minority enrollment, minority students may be more limited in transfers to four-year colleges than are non-minorities.

Interinstitutional Relations and Community College Transfer: Implications and Conclusions

Institutions of higher education (both two- and four-year) need to be aware of the potential effects of institutional linkages on student transfers in general and particularly on minority student transfers. More work needs to be done to determine the nature and potential impact of community college linkages to four-year colleges and to the workplace as well as to the surrounding community. If institutionalized linkages between two- and four-year colleges exist systemwide, and if low-transfer community colleges have a high concentration of minorities, these linkages may have a differential effect on the transfer of minority and majority students.

To equalize transfer opportunities for all community colleges, old routines must be consciously changed, not only at the individual level, but at the organizational level as well. Faculty, staff, and "transfer-knowledgeable" students may discuss and promote a wide array of four-year college options to new students, while college representatives (both two- and four-year) can be opening, developing, and strengthening a wide array of interinstitutional ties. Even those college sites reporting relatively high transfer rates, noted that curricular and other interinstitutional ties could be strengthened.

More college resources could be allocated to the crucial articulation function. Articulation officers quoted here have a heavy student counseling workload, and some also coordinate and advertise campus visits by four-year college representatives. This

staffing pattern does little to help the low transfer college establish linkages with four-year colleges or to help higher-transfer colleges broaden their linkages.

In addition, the instructional administrative arm of the community college could share the articulation function with the student services staff. Since the goal of articulation is to link curriculums, it might be strengthened by more faculty participation. Successful articulation efforts with high schools and four-year colleges described by College Discrepant take place with high faculty participation from all the educational institutions. If the instructional administrative arm did share the articulation effort, student services staff could continue to have a coordinating role.

Finally, four-year postsecondary institutions may need to expend more resources in outreach to "low transfer" and/or high minority enrollment community college sites. Although it may not be cost-efficient for four year colleges, more resource expenditure may be justified in order to assist community colleges with low transfer rates to expand transfer horizons for their students. As one community college president explained, "This year we ran classes even if the enrollment was low just to maintain our presence in the [Hispanic] community.... We want to prove that there is a [college] commitment to the community.... It's a view toward long range goals versus short range goals."

These suggestions are supported by recommendations Cohen (1988) makes to facilitate transfer, which include: faculty exchange, dual student admission, coordinated student support services,

communication between staff members, and increased formalization of state-level policies to guarantee university admissions at the junior level for community college students.

While community college relational networks appear to have an impact on the transfer process, colleges which enjoy a high transfer status should also assess whether that status equally benefits various racial/ethnic groups within the college. College Discrepant, for example, has a good overall transfer rate. However, there is a wide discrepancy of transfer between majority and minority students.

Changes in the articulation process described here will require breaking well established interinstitutional routines. This will take time and focused, sustained effort.

References

Brint, S. & Karabel, J. (1989). The diverted dream: Community colleges and the promise of educational opportunity in America: 1900-1985. New York: Oxford University Press.

Clark, B.R. (1983). The higher education system: Academic organization in cross-national perspective. Berkeley: University Press.

Cohen, A.M. (1988, Summer). Degree achievement by minorities in community colleges. The Review of Higher Education, 11(4), 383-402.

Granovetter, M. (1985, November). Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. American Journal of Sociology, 91(3), 481-510.

Kanter, R.M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Merton, R.K. (1968, January 5). The Matthew effect in science. Science, 159 (3810), 56-63.

Olivas, M.A. (1979). The dilemma of access: Minorities in two year colleges. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.

Pressman, J.L. & Wildavsky, A. (1973). Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Richardson, R.C., Jr., & Bender, L.W. (1987). Fostering minority access and achievement in higher education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Rogers, E.M. & Kincaid, D.L. (1981). Communication networks: Toward a new paradigm for research. New York: The Free Press.

Turner, C.S. (in press). A California case study: Organizational determinants of the transfer of Hispanic students from two- to four-year colleges in the Bay Area. Metropolitan Education.

Watkins, B.T. (1990, March 28). Consistent information transfer rates sought for community colleges. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Watkins, B.T. (1990, February 7). 2-year institutions under pressure to ease transfers: Critics say unneeded complexity deters many minority students. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges AUG 16 1991